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RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 2947
RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO 1228
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA 1200
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 2149
RUEHPB/AMEMBASSY PORT MORESBY 3942
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 4844
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 2409
RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON 2988
RUEHHK/AMCONSUL HONG KONG 2910
RUEHBA/AMCONSUL PERTH 1071
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RHHJJPI/USPACOM HONOLULU HI
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RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 JAKARTA 001614

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [PHUM](#) [ID](#)

SUBJECT: NOTORIOUS FORMER GENERAL TRIES TO MAKE MARK IN
POLITICS

REF: A. JAKARTA 1593

[1](#)B. JAKARTA 1441

[1](#)C. JAKARTA 1405

[1](#)D. JAKARTA 1366

[1](#)E. JAKARTA 1043 AND PREVIOUS

JAKARTA 00001614 001.2 OF 002

Classified By: Pol/C Joseph L. Novak, reasons 1.4(b+d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: Prabowo Subianto, a retired general with a poor human rights record, has formed his own political party and announced that he plans to run for president. Prabowo's case is similar to that of Wiranto (one name only), another former general who is a candidate for president and also has a poor human rights record. While his party seems to be well-funded and is already running slick TV ads, few observers think that Prabowo et al. will make much of a mark.
END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (C) This message is part of Mission's background series on Indonesia's political parties ahead of the April 2009 national legislative elections. Ref B discusses the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P), Ref C concerns the National Awakening Party (PKB), Ref D focuses on Golkar and Refs E analyze the Islamic-oriented Prosperous Justice Party.

HE'S BACK!

[1](#)3. (C) A notorious former military officer is back in the news. Prabowo, a former general, has formed his own political party and announced that he intends to run for president in 2009. (Note: The legislative elections take place in April 2009 and the presidential elections take place in July 2009.) Prabowo's party is called Gerindra (a Bahasa Indonesia acronym standing for "Great Indonesia Movement").

[1](#)4. (C) The party was founded in February 2007 and remains extremely small. It does have various offices around the

country and was officially listed as a party by the Election Commission for purposes of the April 2009 legislative elections. In keeping with Prabowo's rhetoric, the party stands substantively for forceful nationalism and adherence to "Pancasila" (Indonesia's founding national code, which does not recognize any single religion but several). The party seems well-funded and has already put slick advertisements on TV focusing on such themes as prosperity and agriculture.

A CONTROVERSIAL REPUTATION

15. (C) To say that Prabowo has a controversial reputation is an understatement. As a high-ranking general in the late 1990's (including service as commander of Kopassus, Army special forces) and a close associate of the Suharto administration, Prabowo was implicated in serious human rights abuses that took place in Indonesia and East Timor. Due to his general unpopularity and on the run from various court cases, he went into self-exile in Jordan and Germany for several years. He re-appeared in time for the 2004 presidential elections, but he was defeated for the nomination of the Golkar party.

16. (C) Prabowo, 56, also is a former member of the Suharto family by marriage. In a connection which helped his military career immensely, he was married to one of Suharto's daughters, Titiek, before they divorced several years ago. Prabowo is believed to continue to maintain close links with some members of the Suharto clan. While Prabowo also has money (he is involved in several companies), these Suharto-related links are believed to be key for the funding of his party and political activities.

JAKARTA 00001614 002.2 OF 002

17. (C) Prabowo is also known for choosing controversial associates. One high-level member of his party is Muchdi Purwoprandjono, a former intelligence official and high-ranking general (also a former commander of Kopassus) who has been charged with complicity in the murder of well-known human rights activist Munir Thalib in October 2004. Muchdi's trial began last week (see Ref A) and a conviction in the highly publicized case would likely severely impair any chances that Prabowo and his party have in the 2009 election.

TENSIONS WITH ANOTHER FORMER GENERAL

18. (C) Prabowo has very poor relations with another general, Wiranto, who is also running for president. Rivals for power toward the end of Suharto's long reign, the two have clashed repeatedly over the years, including in 2003-04 when Wiranto defeated Prabowo and became Golkar's candidate for president. Prabowo is also believed to resent Wiranto over what he considers to be the "selling out" of rank-and-file troops who were charged earlier this decade with human rights abuses in East Timor.

NOT GIVEN MUCH OF A CHANCE

19. (C) Though seemingly well-financed, observers do not think that Prabowo will make much of a mark in 2009. Prabowo is not seen as a particularly effective politician and his party is new and untested. In addition, he is basically competing with Wiranto for the same voters, i.e., those who want "a strong-armed leader" in charge again. All that said, Prabowo is a survivor with connections and money, all factors which indicate that he should not be completely counted out.

HUME